

Before the Dinner.

I. We went direct to Tobula, the capital of Sequoia, and opened headquarters at the Ladevan House. Besides being a political center, Tobula was also the great railroad town of the State, the main offices of the Transmontane Railroad under the supervision of our new Senator, Hector Cabanis, being situated there. Thus Mr. Savage could be in constant touch with all the forces upon whose aid he counted to secure a triumphant return to the United States Senate.

There was nothing solid politically about Tobula. For forty years it had waxed in wisdom from the object lessons of successive Territorial and State Legislatures. Tobulians assorted political trickery with their mothers' milk. They played at caucuses before they were out of long clothes. They pulled wires for appointment to office in their childish games.

Long before they reached maturity politics had become their meat and drink, especially the latter. Thenceforth they breathed politics, and when they slept, which they never did except with one eye open, they dreamed politics.

The *Sequoia Leaf*, the party organ of the State, was published at Tobula, and somewhere in the dingiest and most remote of its dingy and remote offices, millionaire Adit, editor and proprietor, Billie Adit, as familiar with every filament and mesh of the web as the grayest of old gray spiders.

For years it had been generally conceded that the complexion of any new Legislature depended upon the manipulations of Boss Adit. He controlled the Assembly nominations from Tobula, holding the four district conventions in advance of others in the State. These nominations pointed the way; and as they were pronounced strong or weak in the *Leaf*, they informed the knowing throughout the State whether the Boss intended to carry or throw the coming election.

Past favors bound Adit to the two Senators from Sequoia. Senator Savage had been his attorney in the deal whereby he acquired a majority of the stock of the *Leaf* and shut off the family which for generations had passed the paper down as an heirloom in minority cold storage. It was a part of that common knowledge which explains but does not accuse that many of his millions had come from lobbying through the schemes that Senator Cabanis devised for the advantage of the Transmontane.

Naturally, my Senator reeked Adit as a lieutenant in the coming fight against former Senator Merrifield; not choosing to recall that a favor, while standing for perforce on the present, looks eagerly toward the future, and turns its back resolutely on the past. It was on the evening of our arrival that Senator Savage expressed such a confidence to his colleague, his meagre shoulders and his black wisp of a mustache twitched in union.

"When Adit is under your thumb, he is there," he said. "If you raise it to look for him he is gone. Things have changed in the last month. Haven't you heard of his marriage?"

"Marriage? You don't tell me!" cried my Senator. "I took him to be a confirmed old bachelor."

"Confirmed and old, all right, but no longer a bachelor. He married Mollie Merrifield."

"Impossible! Why I can remember when she sang in her brother's saloon and then sat out at the tables. No wonder he didn't send cards."

"Ah, but he did send them broadcast; there's the very rub. Mistress Mollie has social aspirations, consequently social resentments."

"Adit surely doesn't think that I would slight—"

"Oh, no; your state of single blessedness lets you out all right, Savage. 'Tis a feminine war; that's the reason why it is so bitter."

"But Gov. Schrigley, your man Friday, whom you own body, soul and breeches—he has a daughter, Geraldine, if you please. And Miss Geraldine is so high and mighty that she wouldn't condescend either to acknowledge the wedding invitation or to invite the bride to her garden party last week."

"Big Tom Merton told me all about it. The word has gone forth. It's anathema against all allies of the house of Schrigley, and that takes in us both."

Mr. Savage looked vexed.

"If there is really anything to the matter, Cabanis," he said, "you take it too lightly. Merrifield is so strong in the city that he will be satisfied, and with good reason, if Adit only keeps his hands off."

"You don't want a popular contest, a real show of hands, do you? Well, that's what we must accept unless Adit agrees to fight it out for us on the old line."

"Think of his machine—a Pretorian Guard in every precinct, by Jove. And if, instead, we must go pell-mell into a scrimmage—why it makes me sick!"

"The situation stands, whether I fribble or you get sick," interposed Cabanis doggedly.

"Mrs. Adit is a versatile, audacious woman, who will allow nothing to interfere with her ambitions."

"She has already been remarkably successful. The very fact that she is Adit's wife shows how supreme her influence is with him. What can we offer to offset it? He has more money than he knows what to do with."

"On the other hand, pretty Geraldine is just as resolute and fearless. She has been mistress of the Governor's mansion since her mother died, and takes pride in making its hospitality a guaranty of character and worth. She will never give quarter nor cry it. Why—"

Senator Savage looked up suspiciously.

"You number yourself among Schrigley's allies, Cabanis," he said; "but I never knew you were close to him."

"I am recognized as a pretender to the young lady's hand," explained Cabanis, with a softening of his beady eyes.

My Senator lost no time in paying his respects to Adit's bride, taking me with him as a sort of retinue, I suppose. Nothing could be smoother than his felicitations, except the way they were received. No Lady Clara Vere de Vere ever accepted homage more naturally and arrogantly than did this his ndome, bright eyed daughter of the people.

"Presently Adit himself came shambling in his stogy way, his dull gaze lightening only when turned to w. r. d his lightning. The way of politicians, even if the matter is no more secret than the exchange of cigars

he and my Senator drew away into a corner and whispered.

Then Mrs. Adit recognized my presence for the first.

"You might mention to your master, Mr. Duffer," she remarked between languid waves of her fan, "that if he is looking for Tobula Assemblymen I will tell him how best to get them when we meet at the Governor's dinner table. Otherwise, I might have to give the information to Mr. Merrifield; they say he is a good deal of a gentleman. Bliss, dear, won't you come here for a moment?"

And the lurching conference in the corner adjourned *à sine die*.

There is a fable, I think, about one gnat driving a lion mad. It was plain to me when I told Mrs. Adit's ultimatum to my Senator that the thought of this trumpet bit of social jealousy complicating and even endangering so important a matter as his political future was having like effect upon him. He wore vigorously, in marked contrast with his habit of letting the other fellow do the swearing.

"Come," he said briefly, and up to the Capitol we hurried to demand instant and private audience with the Governor.

Gov. Schrigley was one of the men who strive to counteract the blandness of their lips by a heavy beard; but only succeed in drawing the line of emphasis under their helplessness. He sighed when my Senator finished explaining the situation and enouncing its remedy.

"I sometimes fear I have been overindulgent with Geraldine," he said. "It is possible to give a child her own way until you have none of your own left."

"It is my way we are talking about now," corrected Mr. Savage, pitilessly.

"Of course," the Governor went on, with one mental picture turned home and the other abroad, and ill pleased with either prospect, "of course, you are right in saying that the annual dinner to the Regents of the State University is about due. They have their convocation next month and we are just about to issue the cards. But it is the most exclusive function of the year, the one in which Geraldine takes the most pride and care. It is, isn't it, my son, that the very choicest fruit and flower of our civilization should be gathered together in honor of these learned men?"

"Whatever is it right in politics," retorted the Senator significantly, "while virtue is its own only reward."

"Oh, if you are going to put it that way, I suppose I must admit—"

"It isn't a submission to oblige a friend who will be anxious to oblige you in turn. Come, Governor, don't let us make a mountain out of a mole hill. Send an invitation as I suggest to the Adits without saying anything about it to your daughter. I guarantee that before the eventful evening comes she herself will be regretting that this has not been done. Then you will have a pleasant surprise for her."

"And for myself," grumbled the Governor, "if you come within a thousand leagues of the truth."

I was concerned to see my Senator so elated over this victory. He chuckled contentiously, as if to keep his courage up, though formerly it was his wont to reserve his laughter for guarded use in his sleeve. Perhaps he was realizing how worthless is a vulgar guarantee.

When we got back to the rooms, however, he wrote a pretty little note to Mrs. Adit, in which he ventured to express the hope that the high privilege he had secured of being her escort at the Regents' dinner might prove a pleasure to her. Then he sent for his colleague, Mr. Cabanis, and told him all he had done.

This conversation was not a part of my liberal education, though from specimens that penetrated the partition on the sharp notes of anger I judged it to be stormy.

So far as I could make out, Mr. Savage kept insisting that Cabanis should press his suit at once to a successful issue, and thus be able to sway Miss Geraldine's prejudices, while the latter bitterly resented so sordid a use of his sentiments.

In the end they agreed upon the following compromise—that Mr. Cabanis should offer himself when the auspicious seemed favorable, and that in the event of his success Mr. Savage should at the last moment, as his next friend, explain to the girl how essential it was that she accept Mr. Adit cordially.

As a preliminary, the two seated at the Governor's house, and my Senator became acquainted with Geraldine Schrigley.

There must have been something implacable about Miss Schrigley's bearing, for my Senator did not bring back the assurance he took with him. From his abstracted manner, his long meditations, it was plain that he was already conjuring the alternative, what should be done in case the plan outlined failed. I looked with apprehension upon this development, for he never sought trouble, putting his best foot forward, and reserving the darker, deeper approach as a last resort.

Meanwhile there was plenty in the political situation to keep his wife engaged. Mr. Merrifield had already begun his campaign of education throughout the State, revealing and denouncing the records of the two Senators, explaining his own scheme of taxation reform, and above all calling upon the people to shake off machine thralldom and exercise their rightful power. Reports showed an awakening to and an interest in the new order which it would need all the cunning and force of the old to overcome.

It was a fight between volunteers and regulars. To our headquarters thronged the mercenaries, looking for spoils and blind to principles. It was part of my duty to receive these aspirants for dubious honors, sending away the many with vague promises and reserving the few for definite performances.

One morning there came into my room a rough and burly fellow, who stood by my desk, his hand in his pocket, his cutty pipe in his mouth, looking down on me with a sort of companionate strength.

"Just tell Savage," he said, "that Jake Bliven would have a word with him."

"The Senator is extremely busy," I explained, "with matters of high—"

"He won't be too busy to take a straight tip from me," he rumbled. "He knows that there ain't a man in the old Four, if I do say it, wit' my pull."

"But the Senator cannot interfere in local affairs," I protested. "The thing for you to do is to get on with Adit."

The rumble became a growl.

"When I see Adit," he said, giving emphasis with a stubby finger, "these will be doing with a stubby finger, 'these will be doing. Damn him. To think to 'crow

me down for the likes of Tom Merton, just because he went deaf on his sister. He ain't straight, I tell you."

The door of the private office opened. My Senator stepped out with extended hand.

"What," he exclaimed, "I thought I couldn't mistake these sonorous tones. Guff and tough, but sound to the core! Come in, Jake, my boy. Time must hang up its pedometer while we talk over the good old days."

There was no rumble or growl from within; only whisps, too faint, too cautious to enlighten. Presently Bliven swaggered out.

"Ta ta, office boy," he roared with a sort of ferocious glee. "When you gits your growth you'll know more, p'raps."

I was cogitating the application of this saying when Senator Cabanis hurried through, plainly perturbed, a newspaper in his hand. Again there were whisps, not so faint and cautious that I could not detect the excitement permeating them.

Perhaps my detection might have gone even further had not the telephone bell rung fast and furiously. A feminine voice impatient, insistent, demanded to know if Senator Cabanis was in the office.

"Then tell him," it continued before I had half replied, "that Miss Geraldine Schrigley must see him at once—this very minute."

The transmitter rattled with emphasis as I delivered the message.

"There," exclaimed Cabanis, despairingly, "that's what comes of your cursed interference."

"I tell you, Cabanis, it will be all right," persisted my Senator, following him out. "Do what I say, belittle the report as too absurd for contradiction. We all make mistakes. When I do make one I make recompense at any cost."

The newspaper lay on the floor of the deserted room. I picked it up; it opened naturally at the fashion page. There I read a detailed description of the gorgeous costume Mrs. Bliss Adit would wear at the Regents' dinner.

It was my custom every afternoon to go to the *Leaf* office and deliver to Mr. Adit any important intelligence we had received, at the same time obtaining from him the confidential reports that had come in during the day.

It was characteristic both of the man and his leadership that the unlikeliest way to find him was to inquire for him at his business address. Not one of the clerks ever possessed any information as to the whereabouts of their chief, except that he wasn't there.

Senator Savage had taught me the underground route by which the lair of the boss was reached, and accordingly that afternoon I proceeded through the alleys, cellars and rear buildings which constituted his labyrinth, until I reached the narrow side door to the private office, which no one from the front dared enter unless summoned by an elaborate system of electric calls.

I rapped once and again, waiting in the close and gloomy court, upon which not a window of the high surrounding walls opened. I rapped and I waited, until, waxing impatient, I turned the knob. The door gave way. I entered.

It was dark in the private office, dark and still. I groped forward, bewildered to find myself alone, yet thinking to leave my papers. I stumbled against something that yielded to the touch. I felt, to lie for an instant in a dampness too sticky to be wet.

At an instant, only. Sudden horror swept me to my feet, to the wall, to dash my hands frantically over the keyboard of the electric calls.

The lights gleamed in the ceiling and twinkled from the desks. There on the floor in a mire of blood lay the unconscious form of Bliss Adit.

Both Senators expressed sympathetic interest when I bore back the news to headquarters.

"Dear, dear," sighed Mr. Savage. "Struck from behind with a blackjack, you say, Buffum? Did the miscreant leave no trace, no clue?"

"Nothing was found, sir," I replied, "except a copy of Mr. Merrifield's address to the people, lying on the floor near by."

"What do you think of that, Cabanis?" cried Mr. Savage. "Could we have a stronger instance of the horrible effect of such incendiary speeches? I believe the people will hold Merrifield at least morally guilty."

The *Leaf* accuses him of complicity in the assault in its extra," I explained.

"It is well in any calamitous dispensation of Providence," continued my Senator unctuously, "to look for the underlying good. Our poor Adit had many admirable qualities, but it became evident to me that he was no longer the man he once was. I need only refer to his unfortunate marriage and the all compromising influence of his wife to illustrate what I mean."

"Besides, it lately came to my knowledge that he has been secretly intriguing with Merrifield, putting himself in that position between and between which would enable him if he chose to go over entirely to him. It is unnecessary as it would be ungallant for me to speak more definitely of his motive in so doing."

"Hence, we cannot regard the removal of a worn out and disloyal leader as an unmixed evil. The crisis demands a man of strength and fidelity, such a one as that fine fellow who was in here to-day—what was his name?"

"Do you mean Bliven?" I suggested.

"Assuredly, Jake Bliven, a power in the Fourth ward, where they have tried in vain to down him; rough and gruff, but sound to the core."

Senator Cabanis, who had been listening, suddenly interrupted, his face alight with sentimental hopefulness.

"It puts a better aspect on my personal matter, Savage," he cried.

"Indeed it does, no need now of excuse or evasion. Mrs. Adit, in her grief and bereavement will keep secluded."

A lad dashed into the room with the latest of the *Leaf's* extras, wet from the press.

"Postscriptum," I read from the remotest corner. "Dr. Pow's unparalleled feat in trephining. The distinguished patient now conscious and likely to recover."

"Hell! cried the Senators in dismal union. "She may attend the Regents' dinner after all!"

From Harper's Weekly.

An invention which should prove of great value to the electrical and technical world generally has recently been perfected by a Portuguese cork firm.

It is a general non-conductor, and has for its principal component granulated cork, and is called "cortice." Its application would appear to be practically unlimited, as it forms a perfect insulator, will resist the utmost extremes of climate, and the attack of insects, even white ants, are powerless against it.

It is not inflammable, and might be used for partitions in buildings and to replace wooden partitions, besides, it can be saved and bored like wood. It is said that if boiler tubes and boilers are covered with sheets of cortice, there is not only a great saving of heat, but the temperature of the boiler room is reduced to an agreeable degree.

The Travelling Grocerman Hears of Injin Will, Rum and Treasure.

"The last train for the day out of the queer town into which in a wild moment I had wandered during a trip through south Jersey came and went and I missed it," said John Gilbert, the travelling grocerman.

"I started to bemoan my fate, for the place itself was depressing and the one tavern it contained was far from inspiring thoughts of Christmas charity and words fitting to them. But the tall old native in the shiny black frock coat and the plug hat long overdue, and smoking a very black and fat red cigar, who sat in the tavern sloop had got only a little way into his story when I knew I was going to be pleased that I had missed that train."

"Right around these here parts is where Injin Will used to do things," was the tall old native in the shiny coat, antiquated hat and pervasive clay pipe beard, "but he was the ungratefullest being, either human or Injin, that ever soaked rum, 'cause what he ought to do was to hand them treasures over to Whisperm."

"He was telling me somethin' 'bout Whisperm Henry tellin' Injin Will where to find the pine knot he could kill his wife's Uncle Jake with, Injin Will would 'a' been whoopin' on 'the happy huntin' grounds years an' years afore he was. I don't care a clam shell what the res' of 'em around here mowt tell you about it, neither!"

"The native of seedy garb and pipe of wide scope shook his head and waved his pipe toward me as much as to say that if I had heard any other version of the doings of Injin Will I had best put it out of my mind, and I began to feel more than ever that by its faithfulness to schedule time that train had done me a favor."

"Injin Will," the tall and positive native resumed, "was an Injin that I don't have no personal recollection of, but there ain't no one else in the Jersey pines or along the coast that knows about him the way I do. He lived in a cabin over along Barnegat Bay, yender, an' it was Whisperm Henry who told me that Injin Will would find the pine knot that he could kill his wife's Uncle Jake with."

"Whisperm Henry Worth was my grandfather's own uncle, so you see I git the story of 'this Injin as straight as a string. For Whisperm Henry told it to grandfather, an' grandfather passed it to father, an' father an' mother talked it to me more times than there's fleas on a coon dog, an' I never forgot a word of it. Some will tell you one thing an' some will tell you another, but the hab'ant of 'em around here mowt tell you, 'cause Whisperm Henry told it to grandfather, an' grandfather passed it to father, an' father an' mother talked it to me more times than there's fleas on a coon dog, an' I never forgot a word of it. Some will tell you one thing an' some will tell you another, but the hab'ant of 'em around here mowt tell you, 'cause Whisperm Henry told it to grandfather, an' grandfather passed it to father, an' father an' mother talked it to me more times than there's fleas on a coon dog, an' I never forgot a word of it. 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